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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [UN](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SRSG QAZI AND AMBASSADOR DISCUSS UNAMI ROLE,
NEIGHBORS, AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During an introductory meeting, the Ambassador and UN Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG), Ashraf Qazi discussed Iraq's regional relations, timing for provincial elections, Iran's regional ambitions, and a possible role for the UN in the Kirkuk Article 140 process. He informed us that the Secretary General's Special Advisor for the International Compact for Iraq, Ibrahim Gambari, would be visiting Iraq April 5-8, and gave feedback on the Secretary General's recent visit to Baghdad. Qazi gave his impressions of PM Maliki, Grand Ayatolla Sistani. Qazi further stated that he is prepared to raise the UNAMI staffing ceiling and deploy as many as twelve new UN staff members to the Basrah Air Station. End Summary.

AMBASSADOR TO QAZI: UNAMI ROLE IS IMPORTANT

¶2. (C) The Ambassador initiated the conversation with SRSG Qazi by expressing appreciation for Qazi's service in Iraq over the past three years. He noted the many challenges that remained in Iraq and underscored the U.S. Mission's commitment to continuing to work closely with UNAMI, which has an important and irreplaceable role to play in Iraq's democratic development.

¶3. (C) Qazi welcomed he Ambassador, reflecting on the many developments he had seen during his tenure in Baghdad. Qazi introduced his impressions by saying that although we have seen security plans, met milestones, obtained UN Security Council resolutions, held elections, and created a parliament, the security situation remained troubling and there is still much to do in strengthening democracy. . He noted the importance for capitals to focus on timelines and milestones that reflect realities on the ground in Iraq rather than our own domestic exigencies. He also noted the importance of assessing honestly opportunities in Iraq as well as the many limitations.

¶4. (C) At the same time, Qazi assessed that Iraq is making a transition. It ultimately may take longer and cost more, but we should stay the course. Qazi welcomed what he characterized as a new regional approach by the U.S. toward Iraq. A broader approach may yield sudden dividends, in Qazi's view, because of "a great desire on the part of all Iraqis to get out of the current situation."

NEIGHBORS, CONFERENCES AND THE ICI

¶5. (C) Qazi informed us that the Secretary General's Special Advisor (SGSA) on the International Compact for Iraq (ICI), Ibrahim Gambari, is arriving in Iraq on April 5. SGSA Gambari would like to announce the date and venue for the ICI

prior to his departure the afternoon of April 8. The Ambassador observed that a decision would then have to be made by close of business April 6, since the Prime Minister starts traveling on April 7.

¶16. (C) Contrary to what Iraqis may perceive, Qazi opined, all of Iraq's neighbors believe they are acting defensively in Iraq. He asserted that, based on his conversations, he believes that even Iran feels it is being defensive. Qazi said that Iranian officials had told him they recognize that they cannot control Iraq for two reasons: (1) Iraq is an Arab country, not Persian, and (2) the Shi'a do not have an absolute majority. He said Iranians view Iraq like Turkey does - a long term neighbor - and they do not want an uncontrollable situation. In fact, the Iranians are telling us they are happy the U.S. is here, stated Qazi.

PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, KIRKUK

¶17. (C) In Qazi's view, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani may oppose provincial elections at the governorate level this year; instead, Qazi said he understood that Sistani seeks elections at the District Government level, which he views as more relevant to the lives of average Iraqis. Qazi asserted that elections at that level could not be achieved this year with the current voter registration system, and, in his view, would require a delay until next year. Qazi said it was hard to tell what would happen in the South in provincial elections - moderates might or might not lose ground to extremists. With regard to elections, the Ambassador stated that he hoped the UN appreciated the importance of provincial elections for Iraq's stability as well as the need to adapt

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to Iraqi realities.

¶18. (C) Qazi stated the UN could play a constructive role in resolving the KRG boundary disputes and status of Kirkuk. He noted a recent paper his staff had done on the issue that indicated political solution may be preferable to a referendum. Qazi committed to remain in close contact with the mission in coming months as Iraqi political players begin to deal with the issue of Kirkuk, hopefully in a more forthright manner. The Ambassador agreed that there may indeed be a potential UN role on Kirkuk. The possibility, however, would need to be broached delicately with the Iraqis, particularly the Kurds.

THE UNSYG VISIT; UNAMI'S ROLE

¶19. (C) Qazi stated that the Secretary General's (SYG) visit to Iraq in March was "very successful," he met with everyone except Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, leader of the United Iraqi Alliance, who apologized for being unable to meet. The SYG told the Iraqis that his decision to visit Iraq so early in his tenure was to show the priority of Iraq. Qazi recommended a second trip at an appropriate point in the future.

¶10. (C) The Ambassador agreed that another UNSYG trip would, indeed, be useful, particularly if it highlighted the important role UNAMI continues to play here. To that effect, the Ambassador urged that UNAMI begin to return staff to Baghdad after drawing down by roughly one-third in November. Specifically, the Ambassador suggested that the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) place permanent staff in Baghdad. The Ambassador acknowledged that difficult security environment in Baghdad, but underscored that the UN could play a key role in promoting reconciliation and in strengthening democratic institutions. Qazi replied that, in

response to previous requests by the Embassy, both UNHCR and the ICRC would soon be placing permanent international staff in Baghdad.

QAZI'S OBSERVATIONS ON MALIKI, SISTANI

¶11. (C) Qazi noted that Prime Minister Maliki is an introvert and not a very good reconciler. He comes from the Dawa movement, which originated as an underground opposition party and is very conspiracy focused. Qazi posited that sometimes U.S. support may act as a disincentive for Maliki to take action on key issues.

¶12. (C) Qazi stated he visits Sistani once every four months; his next visit is scheduled in May. He opined that Sistani's son is the gatekeeper for the father: the son controls access to the father, finishes his father's sentences, and is the most authentic voice for the father. The son will never replace the father's religious authority, but he is filling the role of the father's political spokesman.

¶13. (C) Sistani appears to have been in despair for some time with the level of sectarian killings, in Qazi's view. Sistani blames the Sunni leadership for "squandering opportunities to participate." Qazi acknowledged, however, that the Sunni leadership does not have much influence, and that they have to play to the gallery to protect their own lives: look at what happened to Deputy Prime Minister Zubai.

¶14. (C) The Ambassador ended the meeting by reaffirming the importance of consulting closely. The issues in Iraq are of tremendous importance. The UN's role, he emphasized, will be critical in the months ahead in Iraq.
CROCKER